

Budget Will Include \$10 Million To Deploy Broadband In Rural NC

By Administrator

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North Carolina House and Senate leaders announced the state budget will include the Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT) program to facilitate the deployment of broadband to unserved communities in rural North Carolina. “We live in a global economy where broadband is essential to providing economic opportunities for individuals and small businesses,” said Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee co-chairman Sen. Harry Brown (R-Onslow). “In order for North Carolinians in rural areas to receive these same economic opportunities, we have developed this program to encourage providers to deploy broadband at the highest possible speeds.”

The GREAT program sets aside \$10 million to be awarded as a series of grants that will help incentivize providers and cooperatives to provide broadband to unserved rural areas. It is designed to significantly expedite the deployment of broadband by encouraging partnerships and competition between providers and cooperatives to provide citizens with improved choices and better value for service.

Additionally, North Carolina’s share of the \$600 million the federal government approved to expand rural broadband access earlier this year will go to the GREAT program.

Applicants must meet certain metrics to qualify including evidence that there is support for the project from citizens, local government, businesses and institutions.

Grants will be awarded based on a points system that takes into account the number of households and businesses being served, the cost per household and the minimum download and upload speeds, as well as whether multiple entities are partnering together on the project. This points system will also determine what percentage of the funding will be provided by a state match.

“Maximizing broadband capability in every region of North Carolina is essential to maintain our state’s rapid economic growth,” said House appropriations chairman Rep. Dean Arp (R-Union). “Broadband is as essential for economic growth as roads, water and sewer, and low-cost electricity. The GREAT program is an innovative step to help connect North Carolina communities, create jobs, and offer new opportunities in unserved parts of the state.”

While some other states in the country have a similar program to increase broadband

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infrastructure, North Carolina's is a unique program in that it incentivizes broadband companies to provide higher speeds to ensure that as much of the state as possible is well-positioned with broadband service for the future.